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UNCLAS ROME 000936

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: ITALIAN LOWER HOUSE SET TO APPROVE FUNDING FOR
MILITARY MISSIONS ABROAD

REFTEL: ROME 638

1.(U) SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED, PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY.

12. (U) ON MARCH 10, THE ITALIAN CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES (THE LOWER HOUSE OF PARLIAMENT) IS EXPECTED TO APPROVE THE GOVERNMENT DECREE EXTENDING UNTIL JUNE 30, 2004, FUNDING FOR ITALY'S PARTICIPATION IN ALL THE MILITARY MISSIONS IN WHICH IT IS ENGAGED ABROAD, INCLUDING IRAQ. (THE OPPOSITION HAS PUT FORWARD NUMEROUS AMENDMENTS AS A DELAYING TACTIC, SO THE EXACT TIMING OF THE VOTE IS UNPREDICTABLE.) THE CHAMBER WILL LIKELY APPROVE THE SAME TEXT IT RECEIVED FROM THE SENATE, BUT MAY MAKE LIMITED, NON-CRITICAL CHANGES. IN THAT EVENT, THE DECREE WOULD HAVE TO GO BACK TO THE SENATE FOR FINAL APPROVAL; WE WOULD STILL EXPECT POSITIVE ACTION BEFORE IT EXPIRES ON MARCH 22. (THE SENATE APPROVED THE ORIGINAL DECREE ON FEBRUARY 18; SEE REFTEL.) THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THE DECREE WILL BE APPROVED WITH THE SOLID VOTES OF THE CENTER-RIGHT GOVERNING MAJORITY.

13. (SBU) WITH THE OUTCOME A FOREGONE CONCLUSION, THE ONLY SUSPENSE IN THE RUN-UP TO THE VOTE HAS BEEN ON HOW MORE MODERATE OPPOSITION ELEMENTS WOULD POSITION THEMSELVES. THE GREENS, COMMUNIST RENEWAL (RC), AND THE ITALIAN COMMUNISTS (PDCI) WILL VOTE AGAINST; THEIR OPPOSITION TO ANYTHING TOUCHING THE U.S.-LED WAR IN IRAQ IS UNSHAKABLE.

BUT THE VOTE BROUGHT CONSTERNATION TO THE MORE CENTRIST, NEWLY-CREATED COALITION OF THE DEMOCRATS OF THE LEFT (DS), ITALIAN SOCIALISTS (SDI) AND THE DAISY, JOINED TOGETHER UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF EU COMMISSION PRESIDENT PRODI IN ADVANCE OF JUNE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND LOCAL ELECTIONS. WHILE STILL IN THE PROCESS OF VAUNTING ITS NEW "UNITY," THE COALITION WAS CONFRONTED WITH AN ISSUE ON WHICH THE DS COULD NOT EVEN AGREE INTERNALLY. IN THE END, THE DS-SDI-DAISY "TRICYCLE" DECIDED NOT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE VOTE, THE SAME ACTION IT TOOK IN THE SENATE. IT IS AN AGREEMENT LIKELY TO BE HONORED IN THE BREACH, HOWEVER. AT A MINIMUM, MUCH OF THE DS' FAR-LEFT "CORRENTONE" WILL VOTE AGAINST. SIMILARLY, SOME OF THE "TRICYCLE'S" MORE MODERATE ELEMENTS MAY VOTE IN FAVOR.

14. (SBU) OF ALL THE MISSIONS COVERED IN THE DECREE, CONTROVERSY CONCERNED ONLY THE ONE IN IRAQ. PRINCIPAL ELEMENTS OF THE CENTER-LEFT SAY THEY COULD ONLY AGREE TO EXTEND THE ITALIAN MISSION TO IRAQ IF, AS DS LEADER FASSINO RECENTLY STATED IN A PRESS INTERVIEW, "SOMETHING REALLY CHANGES" BY THE END OF JUNE -- THE UN ASSUMES A "REAL" LEADING ROLE, AN IRAQI CONSTITUTION IS APPROVED, ELECTIONS ARE HELD, AND A FIRM DATE FOR THE PASSAGE OF POWERS TO THE IRAQIS IS SET. THE "TRICYCLE" IS NOT PREOCCUPIED BY THE FACT THAT MOST OF THESE ELEMENTS HAVE BEEN MET. NOT VOTING AT ALL AND NOT FORMALLY ABSTAINING, THEY SUGGEST, IS A SIGNAL OF DISAPPROVAL TO THE GOVERNMENT WHILE STILL SHOWING SUPPORT FOR ITALIAN TROOPS INVOLVED IN THE VARIOUS MILITARY EFFORTS ABROAD. (COMMENT: IT IS NOT CLEAR THAT THE ELECTORATE UNDERSTANDS THIS PHILOSOPHY. END COMMENT.)

15. (U) SEE REFTEL FOR A BREAK-DOWN ON DOLLAR ALLOCATIONS TO DIFFERENT MISSIONS, AS WELL AS A LIST OF THE MILITARY, CIVILIAN, AND POLICE MISSIONS FOR WHICH FUNDING IS EXPECTED TO BE EXTENDED.

16. (U) CPA BAGHDAD MINIMIZE CONSIDERED.
SEMBLER

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